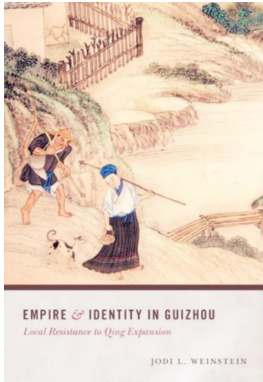


REVIEW: *EMPIRE AND IDENTITY IN GUIZHOU*

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Weinstein, Jodi L. 2014. *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion*. (Studies on Ethnic Groups in China.) Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. xvi+217pp, 3 maps (xiv-xvi); foreword by Stevan Harrell, acknowledgments, notes, Chinese glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780295993270 (paperback \$30.00); ISBN 9780295993263 (hardback \$75.00).

Vagabonds, swindlers, bandits, and rebels. These figures may lie in quiet corners of Qing archives, but under the pen of historian Jodi Weinstein, they not only come alive, but ring out their voices, enmeshed with regional history and state formation. Focusing on the Zhongjia, who are believed to be the forbears of the current day Buyi (Bouyei) *minzu* – one of China's fifty-six state-designated nationalities – Weinstein is interested in how members of such a lesser-known ethnic group in late imperial China's southwestern frontier responded to state centralization with ingenuity. Giving equivalent attention to both imperial and indigenous perspectives, Weinstein carries out a careful, honest examination of historical narratives and livelihood strategies from below. *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion* is thus a timely and refined contribution to the recent waves of scholarship engaged in reappraising agency and livelihoods in the Sino-Southeast Asian borderlands, also known as 'Zomia' in Scott's 2009 influential monograph *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*.

Strikingly similar to the local gazetteer materials Scott quotes at the outset of his book, Weinstein's opening archival source in

Chapter One concisely depicts Guizhou's recalcitrant landscape that led to the frustration of a central administration seeking to control local territories and peoples. Indeed, such harsh terrain served as the backdrop of the dialectical relationships between those who intended to rule and those seeking relative autonomy. For Weinstein, it is essential to understand how local subjects deployed the social, economic, and cultural resources available to them, in the face of state attempts to centralize and standardize. In this first chapter, which provides a concise overview of major themes and perspectives, Weinstein also describes how scholarship in other disciplines lends insights to this study. Following Michaud and his colleagues, including anthropologists and human geographers, Weinstein astutely identifies the 'livelihoods approach', seeking to engage the adaptability and flexibility of subjects at the margins in maintaining their identities and lifeways. To compensate for the lack of written records by the Zhongjia themselves, Weinstein looks to folk literature and ritual texts translated into Chinese as selective historical narratives.

In Chapter Two, Weinstein contextualizes the Zhongjia in the natural and cultural mosaic of Guizhou. The chapter starts with well-known explorer Xu Xike's journal, which illustrates a rugged terrain inhabited by hostile natives – an ecological and human landscape that many still find intriguing. The challenging topography and unfavorable climate, along with limited arable land needed by an increasing population, placed severe constraints on local agricultural livelihoods and commercial activities. The Tai-speaking Zhongjia were among those who lived off Guizhou's limited resources. By presenting the ethnic and historical origins of the Zhongjia, Weinstein rightly points out that their identity was not only permeable through administrative definitions (especially in regard to the contemporary Buyi and Zhuang) but, more interestingly, they were paradoxically seen as intractable and acculturated at once. Further explicated by Weinstein in later chapters, the outward manifestation of 'Sinicization' – such as language borrowing or attire changing – may underplay the broad spectrum of livelihoods strategized by the Zhongjia. While primarily introducing the Zhongjia,

Weinstein also gives due attention to other groups in this historically multi-ethnic landscape, including the Lolo (Nasu Yi), the Miao, and the Han. This chapter ends with a brief account of how imperial authorities from the Yuan and Ming dynasties to the early Qing period imposed governance through *tusi* 'hereditary native chieftains' that produced a "patchwork quilt" with converged zones controlled by native officials and regular administrative units (34-35). This geo-political landscape could be regarded as a semi-periphery, or an internal frontier, and is further examined in the following chapters.

Chapter Three pursues how the Qing sought to penetrate the Zhongjia areas in central and southwestern Guizhou, aiming at imposing direct political control over what Weinstein labels "semi-state spaces." In such areas lying between state and non-state spaces, neither native officials nor regular administrative units "functioned well enough to meet the government's increasing demand for standardization and centralization" (40). Therefore, following his predecessors and yet to a larger extent, the Yongzheng Emperor strove to consolidate imperial rule and order, most clearly through the *gaitu guiliu* policy starting from the 1720s. This policy aimed to reform the native chieftaincy by coopting it back to regular centralized administration. Weinstein picks up Scott's (1998) analytic of 'seeing like a state' that theorizes state legibility and rationality to examine such intention to change and reorganize an internal frontier into full-fledged state spaces. As the Qing imposed its order by siphoning power from native chieftains and establishing new stations and administrative units, the Zhongjia areas witnessed a mix of reactions. For instance, conflict and resistance burst out in Dingfan-Guangshun, where commoners' livelihood choices, including raiding and banditry, were much affected by the arrival of direct imperial rule. This differed from the early-stage compromise experienced in the newly established Nanlong Prefecture along the Guizhou-Guangxi border.

In view of Guizhou's tenuous environmental conditions, with precarious livelihoods increasingly subjected to imperial governance, the next two chapters feature local figures such as self-styled ritual

specialists, who strategized diverse livelihood choices. Chapter Four offers a rich account of local Zhongjia unwilling to submit to consolidating rule from the center, based on criminal cases recorded in imperial archives. Weinstein analyzes three money-making schemes by local Zhongjia that took place in different parts of Guizhou in the mid-1700s. The Zhongjia in these three cases, mostly in pursuit of economic interests, capitalized on local fears of illness or disaster and poverty-induced desperations. This was seen by the Qing authority as a potential political threat, as they partly deployed anti-dynastic slogans and millenarian rhetoric. Much space is given to the case of Huang San, which captures a cross-border situation where religious and ethnic networks exceeded administrative boundaries. At this fluid tri-provincial frontier, Huang San and some self-proclaimed Mo ritual specialists (*bumo*) deployed master-disciple networks, and resorted to chicanery using good-luck charms and alchemy, as well as prophecy and impersonation of a 'new king'. Two other illegal cases presented by Weinstein also involved local villagers being cheated and used to collect money or plot raids.

The protagonists in all three instances, Weinstein suggests, were familiar with Han Chinese culture as well as imperial rule. Nevertheless, they appropriated certain elements to achieve mobility and interests that might have run against the will of the Qing state. This kind of "state mimicry" (82) also points to the unintended consequences of *xianghua* 'advancement toward civilization' on a group like the Zhongjia, who were somewhat Sinicized and yet still intractable.

Weinstein pays special attention to the heterogeneous decisions made by local Zhongjia. She expressly notices the law-abiding Zhongjia subjects in the archival accounts who, presumably for such reasons as self-protection or civic duty, chose to comply with the Qing's legal terms, instead of turning a blind eye or being complicit in illicit money-making activities. In general, Weinstein highlights local Zhongjia who developed intricate strategies and networks linking social and economic resources and magico-religious practices.

Relying on local traditions and religious networks in similar fashions, the Nanlong Uprising examined in Chapter Five was among the minority rebellions with the greatest impact in Guizhou during Qing times. In 1797, Zhongjia religious masterminds, Wang Niangxian and Wei Qiluoxu, initiated a large-scale armed rebellion against Qing rule that revealed long-existing social tensions. Concurrent to major rebellions in other parts of the Qing empire, the Nanlong Uprising is also a landmark event in the history and historiography of the Buyi and related groups. It remains important to local memories and historical narratives. Weinstein, providing the first Western-language analysis of this event, seeks to differentiate from ethnohistorical interpretations by earlier scholars in China, who were bound to the socialist state's agenda. Instead of interpreting the uprising as a peasant struggle against feudal oppression, Weinstein regards the Nanlong Uprising as an elaborate expression of livelihood decisions motivated by local ecological and economic constraints. Most notably, Weinstein uses folk literature in comparison to official archives, seeking to uncover indigenous voices. She demonstrates that central figures like the 'Immortal Maiden Wang' were depicted in local memories and narratives as charismatic leaders acting against poverty and injustice with supernatural skills. These dominant figures developed cult groups and banditry allegedly sanctioned by Heaven. Such tactics, deployed in accordance with traditional beliefs and local landscapes, made Qing suppression challenging. Despite the fact that the rebellion was eventually pacified with the help of some 'loyal' natives and by combined military forces from different regions, Weinstein interprets folk narratives emphasizing moral victories as implying that potential malcontent and unrest may remain dormant.

As concluding remarks, Chapter Six puts forth broader implications and contemporary connections in regard to peripheral landscapes and ethnic peoples, while complicating the understanding of the Qing polity as a multi-national empire. Comparing Guizhou to other peripheries of the Qing, Weinstein suggests that the ideal of configuring a multicultural Qing empire faced special challenges in

Guizhou, given the lack of any shared linguistic, cultural, and religious reference points. Weinstein shows that the Qing authorities engaged in twin processes of civilizing and domestication that sought to impose both moral and socio-political transformations over Guizhou's geographical and human landscape. In the meantime, the efforts to consolidate imperial rule – partly through knowledge production, including ethnographic collections like the Miao albums – underscored an uneven power dynamic. The Zhongjia, as explained by Weinstein, never intended to achieve total autonomy, nor were they granted similar legitimacy as the Manchus, Mongols, Han, Tibetans, and Muslims under the partially inclusive rubric of the Qing's 'great unity'.

Complicating the ethnic hierarchy that concerns Emma Teng (2004) in her study of Taiwanese indigenes, Weinstein regards the Zhongjia as placed between more recognized groups such as the Tai, and those least recognized and incorporated by the Qing such as the Miao. Conditionally acting 'like the Han' or as 'no different from the Han', the Zhongjia appropriated literacy, rituals, symbols, martial arts, and supernatural skills, and sometimes developed extralegal livelihood means. For Weinstein, these resistance strategies enabled constant and continual conversations with imperial authorities and, in turn, contributed to the 'fragile hegemony' of the Qing enterprise that was never complete.

It is also in this last chapter where Weinstein pinpoints how examinations of Guizhou's past shed light on its present, which echoes her first chapter. During fieldtrips in Guizhou, Weinstein observed the kind of uneven opportunities faced by the Buyi and other ethnic groups, even though minority culture has now become a great asset for potential development through commodification and tourism. While these new forms of livelihoods are state-promoted rather than extralegal, Weinstein finds that some locals tend to selectively adopt those strategies that serve their own priorities, without sacrificing their agency. Reminiscent of the trick that served well for the Zhongjia who sought to "maintain as much room to maneuver as possible and, if possible, negotiate a little more" (123), this kind of pragmatism lives on.

Weinstein painstakingly pieces together images of Guizhou's changing landscapes and, in particular, those of an ethnic people that were somewhat absent from previous scholarly discussions. Building on solid historical studies, such as Herman (2007), which emphasize indigenous response to China's colonization of the region, Weinstein's book also carries analytical and methodological significance. Most importantly, the in-between position of the Zhongjia and their semi-state spaces open up a productive venue to engage the interactive dynamics of structure and agency, as well as of state and society. Rather than treating 'Sinicization' as teleology, Weinstein suggests that 'advancement towards civilization' was by no means a *fait accompli*. Some Zhongjia:

... chose not to advance toward mainstream Chinese culture and instead to advance in their own way, by making the livelihood choices that best suited their economic and cultural needs (130).

This denotes that local subjects were not merely reacting to state power, but constantly innovating and refashioning their lifeways, often based on trial-and-error processes. Nevertheless, one wonders about the possible realms and broader implications of such agency, highlighted by Weinstein, as "a shifting matrix of conflict and compromise" (58). To what extent could agency be played out, and how sustainable could such livelihoods be? In other words, if the imperial hegemony was incomplete, were the indigenous resistances also somewhat fragile or limited, and certainly, always contingent and conditional?

Drawing from various primary and secondary sources, Weinstein also brings the politics of knowledge production and modes of representation into question. Reminding us that archival production is a consequential act of governance (Stoler 2010), Weinstein critically engages imperial records and contemporary *minzu* studies constrained by dominant representations and political agendas at the time they were produced. Moreover, while ethno-historical accounts of minorities in China's southwest

periphery tend to focus on local elites, Weinstein seeks to rescue the voices of seemingly insignificant commoners by applying the livelihoods approach to historical analysis. Reading between the lines and against the grain allows her to glean local perspectives from the archives and, in turn, allows us to recognize the agency of subaltern groups.

On the other hand, the scarcity and complexity of both archival and oral materials, especially those concerning the Zhongjia in Guizhou, pose challenges for Weinstein to reproduce historical events and figures in the greatest detail possible, though she is aware and honest about such limitations. For instance, to further examine how a female like Wang Niangxian, acting as a ritual specialist and also as a rebellion leader, became so outstanding in a patriarchal society, one could only make certain assumptions. Likewise, one would need to extrapolate the exact rationales and sentiments underlying the wide range and variety of reactions of local Zhongjia.

By and large, the livelihoods approach emphasized by Weinstein can indeed be applied to both historical and contemporary settings. As Harrell notes in his foreword, embedded forms of agency indicate, "how little has changed even as so much has changed" (viii). Weinstein's insightful analysis of how subjects at the margins have been seldom passive, but instead have actively engaged local conditions and external forces, echoes ethnographic studies of the contemporary situation. Michaud puts forth in the conclusion to *Moving Mountains: Ethnicity and Livelihoods in Highland China, Vietnam, and Laos* (2010:225):

[A]s in any other situation around the world involving ethnic minorities in modernizing states, the lesson is that culture, ethnicity, and agency play core roles in livelihood decision making, alongside local politics and history.

Weinstein's book therefore helps foster greater interdisciplinary dialogues among scholars of the Sino-Southeast Asian borderlands, and perhaps, also has significant global relevance.

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